



# Sanctuary

The Newsletter for Cornwall's Living Churchyards Project

No. 3 Winter 2010

## Message from Revd. Andrew Yates, Diocese of Truro Social Responsibility Officer...

The Diocese of Truro has been fully supportive of Cornwall's Living Churchyards Project since its beginning in 1993.

Our churchyards have been special places for quiet solitude for centuries for people of all faiths and none. Our churchyards have been treasured as a place to remember loved ones and also as places to document social history. More recently our churchyards have been recognised as being important for our wildlife.

Rural churchyards are some of the few areas left that have escaped the pressures of modern farming and artificial fertilisers, and as a result provide havens for wildlife to thrive. They support some of our finest displays of wildflowers and ancient trees, and are home to a variety of wildlife including bats, birds and butterflies. Churchyards in towns also provide valuable green space for wildlife. Through the work of the project the churchyards represent important protected ecosystems where remnants of the local flora and fauna can survive.

Far from being a new fad for the church this is an example of restoring something that has always existed – the local churchyard – as an

embodiment of the church's core teachings about respecting nature.

There are several positives about the project in Cornwall...

• **The very close partnership that exists with Cornwall Wildlife Trust**

Cornwall Wildlife Trust provides access to experts who help carry out scientific surveys, run workshops on nature discovery and good practice maintenance and who offer advice on positively managing the environment. Conservation is not about letting things go unchecked but being proactive in promotion of biodiversity.

• **It becomes a Community Project**

The opportunities to draw in a variety of people from the locality are enormous. Schools, community groups and individuals who may have no commitment to church can still be passionate about preserving this precious space.

• **The Churchyards remain places of quiet contemplation**

Even with the increase in human activity and a growing wildlife in the area, their role as places of solitude and reflection are enhanced so that these parts of God's Acre can truly be places of peace.

So I encourage you to go and visit and learn about and enjoy your nearest Living Churchyard and so be inspired to want to take part or even initiate a project in your own village or community.



## LATEST NEWS !!!!

Living Churchyards has a NEW DISPLAY SCREEN so why not borrow it and put on a display in your church?

CONTACT.....CONTACT.....CONTACT..... do make contact with us, either via Cornwall Wildlife Trust or direct to Robert Moor. We have a new E-MAIL LIST so let us have your details to keep you informed.

WILDFLOWER PLUG PLANTS from locally sourced seed are a good way to highlight your project and will make a really colourful display. Get in touch for details of a local supplier who can help.

BRITISH TRUST for CONSERVATION VOLUNTEERS has a new Camborne-based team poised to help churchyard projects. They have also kindly donated some BIRD BOXES which are up for grabs! Contact us for details.

## Celebrate Biodiversity!

2010 has been declared the International Year of Biodiversity by the United Nations – the year that celebrates the diversity of life on Earth, including every plant, animal and micro-organism together with the habitats in which they live. Churchyards often support species which have disappeared from the surrounding area and the Church of England is a partner in the initiative, highlighting the importance of wildlife-friendly churchyard management in helping to conserve biodiversity.

So now is a great opportunity to learn more about biodiversity, understand why it's important for a healthy environment and get involved in monitoring and conserving your local wildlife. Take action to halt the loss of biodiversity - this year and beyond!



### Don't forget the four principles of Cornwall's Living Churchyards Project:

- Involve the community
- Adopt a wildlife policy
- Provide interpretation
- Gather records



# My own patch.....

## St Mylor Churchyard

Over 10 years ago, a group of St Mylor Church members met and agreed to become part of Cornwall's Living Churchyard Project. A churchyard survey was undertaken and a plan drawn up showing areas suitable for wild flowers, areas to be kept mown and ideas on how to encourage wildlife. This was adopted by the then PCC and a team of enthusiastic workers met regularly and, together with the churchyard gardener, started towards achieving the aims of the plan. Much work was carried out but with the passage of time the churchyard began to overtake their enthusiasm and sadly the brambles, nettles and general maintenance became too much.

So, in April 2009, a meeting was called to discuss the best way forward to tackle the extremely overgrown St Mylor churchyard and Robert Moor, co-ordinator of the Living Churchyards Project, explained the ethos behind the scheme. As a result, over the past

year a regular team of five volunteers have met on Thursday mornings to restore the churchyard and ultimately to re-instate the original Living Churchyard programme. In doing this, much care has been taken to preserve



Cornish hedge under repair at Mylor Churchyard, photo by Helen Fletcher

the lichens found on the headstones. Any wildflowers are carefully noted and wood piles are being formed for small animals to live in. Having tidied up the churchyard boundary, a two metre strip has been left to grow as a corridor through which small animals can run and find food. Many of the shrubs have been pruned and produced an amazing show of new flowers and fresh foliage this year. More recently we have started to re-dress some of the graves using granite chippings that have been donated to us.

With the help of the BTCV volunteers group we have cleared a huge area of the oldest part of the churchyard and have located the oldest grave in the churchyard - that of Thomas Peter, a past vicar of Mylor who died in 1652. The Cornish hedge which forms the boundary between the churchyard and the Old Vicarage has been partially re-built and some dead trees felled. The volunteers also cleared the stream from the Holy Well, constructed a handrail over the stream and built a table and bench using the wood from one of the felled trees.

Since starting this project we have been much encouraged by the wonderful comments received from both visitors to the churchyard and also from those who have family or relatives buried there. We are seeing many more fresh flowers on graves and graves being tended. The thanks we are receiving from families who haven't previously been able to access or find their family's graves is really rewarding and as we now have a computerized detailed historical record of all the graves we are able to more easily locate the location of a grave on request.

There is still much work to do but it is both rewarding and very satisfying and we are happy to welcome any new "lay weeders".

**Helen Fletcher, Co-ordinator**



## Millennium Yews: Ten years on



At the turn of the millennium The Conservation Foundation distributed over 8,000 yews propagated from some of the UK's oldest living trees, estimated to be at least 2,000 years old! Saplings were planted throughout the country in the grounds of schools, hospitals, community centres, ancient woodlands, public parks and churches, with over 90 finding a home within Cornwall's churchyards.

Yew trees have long been associated with churchyards and some ancient specimens may

even pre-date the church building itself, probably forming the basis of many ritual sites for pre-Christian religions. Often growing to become an impressive feature, these sacred trees are considered a living symbol of celebration, immortality and knowledge.

So as the tradition of planting yews in churchyards continues, we would be delighted to hear how the Millennium Yews are faring as they celebrate their first decade amongst the gravestones. If you've been nurturing a yew, please send us an update and photograph of you and your tree. The Conservation Foundation is also asking yew guardians to report back via their website [www.conservationfoundation.co.uk](http://www.conservationfoundation.co.uk).

## CALLING ALL WILDLIFE SPOTTERS

**Whether it's mosses, lichen, fungi, plants, birds, mammals or invertebrates, the Environmental Records Centre for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly (ERCCIS) is keen to hear about any wildlife you've spotted, including in your local churchyard. All wildlife records are important and help to understand and conserve our natural history. The species can be common, unusual or rare and you don't need to have seen the creature itself; perhaps you've identified mammal droppings or a bird song. Just record **WHAT** you saw, **WHERE** you saw it, **WHEN** you saw it and **WHO** you are.**

**For more information and to send ERCCIS your wildlife records visit [www.erccis.co.uk/wildlife\\_recording](http://www.erccis.co.uk/wildlife_recording) or contact the Wildlife Information Service on (01872) 240777 ext 250. Happy Recording!**

The **Great Trees of Cornwall** project is aiming to find, record and protect important trees throughout the county and would like your help. If you know of an ancient, veteran or notable tree or for further information about the project, contact Loveday Jenkin on (01208) 265276 or email [loveday.jenkin@nationaltrust.org.uk](mailto:loveday.jenkin@nationaltrust.org.uk).

# Lookout for Lichens

## What are Lichens?

Lichens are in fact two organisms in one, forming a partnership. The main part of a lichen is a fungus, but scattered within the body of the lichen are algal cells which use photosynthesis to provide energy and nutrition. They are extremely sensitive to change but can live and thrive in a range of habitats, often colonising surfaces (e.g. rock) that plants cannot. Lichens reproduce through fungal spores which find an algal partner and colonise a new surface, eventually creating a new individual. Different species have a wide variety of colour and forms, from powdery crusts to long thin string-like structures, and often grow as beautiful mosaics.

## The Importance of Churchyards

In lowland Britain, where there are few natural rock outcrops, churchyards are very valuable habitats for lichens growing on stone. Even in Cornwall, with extensive coastal rock and inland granite outcrops, churchyards have both mortar and limestone memorials as a substrate for lime-loving lichens which would otherwise be rare in the county. Churchyards are usually relatively undisturbed and contain a diversity of habitats in a small area including the church itself, a variety of memorials and gravestones, trees, wooden seats, boundary

walls, paths and stone chippings on graves. In general the older the church the better it will be for lichens. Cornwall's clean maritime air also encourages the variety and abundance of lichen growth as they are very sensitive to pollution.

## Threats

Some gravestones have been found to be unsafe and laid flat or stacked against a wall. Unfortunately this may destroy the lichen interest on the stone and should be kept to a minimum if possible. Over-enthusiastic cleaning and repointing can also be damaging where lichens grow on old mortar and stone associated with mortar runoff. If possible repairs should be done with lime mortar and only on a small part of the wall at any one time.

## Churchyard Surveys

Various members of the British Lichen Society have surveyed over 80 churchyards in Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, mostly since 2000. A good average number of species in a churchyard is between 70 and 80, including those on stone, wood and trees. The remote church of St Gennys has the most recorded in the county with a total of 150 species and other churchyards supporting over 100 species include Landewednack, St Michael's Mount, Landulph, Linkinhorne



Headstones can support a diversity of lichens, photo by Tamara Weeks

and St Stephen, Saltash. However, virtually all old churchyards are worth visiting for their lichen interest and many more await a formal survey.

## Bob Hodgson, Local lichen expert

For more information visit the British Lichen Society website, [www.thebls.org.uk](http://www.thebls.org.uk)

# Tackling Invasive Plants

Non-native invasive plants can have a significant negative impact on the ecology of an area, including their ability to outcompete native species. They may become established within a churchyard by colonising from adjacent land or being introduced in the belief that they are a tough species which will not need too much maintenance.

Japanese knotweed (*Fallopia japonica*) can be a particular problem and it is even capable of disturbing monuments. The natural reaction may be to cut back such a strong growing plant to control its vigour but this can lead to other problems. For example, strimming can disperse stem material which can then re-root and cutting is very likely to produce more shoots. If shoots are appearing in mown grass it is good practice to keep collected clippings from the affected area separate from other cuttings. Pulling, even of dead canes in winter, can detach small parts of the plant's crown from which new plants will grow. The more enthusiastic may be keen to dig up the plant. Unless the

material has been brought in very recently and is not yet established, it is highly likely this task would need to be continued for many years as the underground root system has been known to extend up to 7 metres in diameter. The plant can also be spread further by this activity as pieces less than the size of a fingernail can easily regenerate.

Currently the most economic method, where there is no immediate requirement to disturb the land, is to use herbicide. The most widely used chemical is probably glyphosate which can be very effective when thoroughly applied over all surfaces of the plant, particularly under the leaves, once a year after the plant has flowered.

The key point is to get to know your plants and to deal with any dramatic colonisers appropriately and with determination, until they are fully removed. The more quickly such invaders are identified and the more rapidly control measures are implemented, the more cost effective the exercise will be, both ecologically and financially.

## James McFarlane, Vegetation Advisor, Cornwall Council

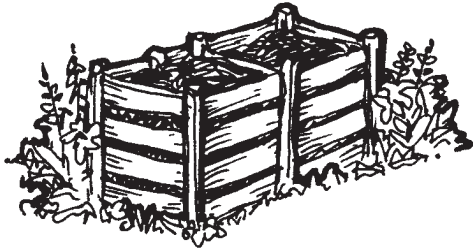
Cornwall Knotweed Forum provides information on Japanese knotweed and a leaflet is available, telephone: 0300 1234 202 or email: [invasives@cornwall.gov.uk](mailto:invasives@cornwall.gov.uk)



# A to Z of Churchyards

## C is for Compost

Creating a compost heap is an ideal way to dispose of grass cuttings and other 'green waste' generated in churchyard management. As well as being a good source of home-made compost they also make excellent habitats for wildlife, providing an abundant food supply for micro-organisms and invertebrates, a warm place to shelter or hibernate for slow-worms, toads and hedgehogs, a breeding site for grass snakes and a source of insects and seeds for birds.



## C is for Creepy Crawlies

Invertebrates are fascinating creatures and include everything from worms, slugs and snails to bees, spiders, butterflies and beetles. They are not only an essential part of the food chain, feeding birds, bats, amphibians and reptiles; we also depend on them for pollination of many of our crops and native plants and for maintaining soil and water quality. Many species are in serious decline but there are some simple things that can be done to help invertebrates in churchyards: maintain a mixture of short turf, bare ground, tussocky grasses and flowering plants; provide structure with trees, shrubs and hedgerows; create log piles;



make a compost heap; and don't be too tidy - ivy, brambles, dead seed heads and rough grass are all important.

## C is for Community

Encouraging people from your local community to get involved in the Living Churchyards Project, for example through practical work days or running an event for a local school, can greatly benefit a churchyard project and also help to qualify for funding. People are more likely to be interested in the management and future of the churchyard if they feel involved in looking after it.

## Young People and the Living Churchyards Project



Wearing decorated animal masks in Kenwyn churchyard, photo by Alison Forward

Getting people to look for wildlife in graveyards causes a number of different reactions in adults, who are often concerned about a lack of respect for the dead or the grieving relatives of those resting there. Children, however, have no such dilemmas and love searching amongst the overgrown areas of our living churchyards for creatures

such as frogs and slow-worms or looking for signs of other wildlife that use these areas after dark.

A number of events were held over the summer. Local school children were taken on a ramble around Illogan churchyard and, amongst all the other trees, were shown the Millennium Yew, grown from a cutting of a tree that was thought to be over two thousand years old! They were then introduced to the slow-worms that find shelter amongst the compost heaps and log piles which abound there.

In Kenwyn churchyard, families were shown how to identify the native trees. The children then used the leaves and fruits they found to make wildlife masks of some of the creatures that live in or under these trees.

St Clement churchyard was the venue for a nocturnal stroll, where families were taken on an electronic search for bats that hunt the huge variety of insects flying overhead



Children meet a bat in St Clements churchyard, photo by David Chapman

after dark. Residents from the local Bat Hospital also attended the event and their carers, Sue & Chris Harlow, enabled the children to see a number of different bats up close and personal.

**Alison Forward, Education Officer, Cornwall Wildlife Trust**

For more information on the scheme or to get involved call

Robert Moor on 01872 272929 email: [rmoor@penmoor.co.uk](mailto:rmoor@penmoor.co.uk)

For a summary of management principles in the churchyard go to

[cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/conservationprojects/living\\_landscapes/cornwall\\_living\\_churchyards\\_wildlife\\_lichens](http://cornwallwildlifetrust.org.uk/conservationprojects/living_landscapes/cornwall_living_churchyards_wildlife_lichens)

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